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THE ERA OF FOREVER WARS

COPING WITH AN EXPLOSIVE MIDDLE EAST

THE HUMAN COST FOR INDIA

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THE SAUDI PREDICAMENT
BY MJ AKBAR



The Great Glass Act

The glow of crafts traditions in contemporary design

I LANDED IN DELHI tired from work and a flight delayed long enough to make even the patient negotiate with the clock. Then I looked out of the plane window. Delhi shimmered below me, a thousand lights scattered across the dark. I felt how much light matters. It steadies us, surprises us, makes us imagine a room—or a life—we have not yet entered.

That thought returned at Galeries Lafayette in Mumbai, where Klove Studio's lights seemed to find every window, floor and corner. The Diwali gathering was on the rooftop, on a night of miserable, humid, horrid heat. The weather might have smothered the evening. But the lights kept working their quiet magic. We looked up; the city looked back. Our mindscapes began to shimmer with hope.

Prateek Jain and Gautam Seth carry Indian craft into the world without sanding away its character. They work with glass blowers and artisans, and with materials that ask for both precision and surrender

Prateek Jain and Gautam Seth, founders of Klove Studio, know how to make light live in a room. Their work is exuberant, even over the top, in the best Indian sense: confident, generous, unafraid of abundance. My mother is a mid-century modernist and a minimalist. I know she will be amazed by how gorgeous this work is. My sister Seema loves creativity and colour; I can imagine her delight in these audacious forms. Indian light need not be shy. These two understand that splendour can have discipline, and spectacle can carry soul.



From their Artichoke series to the tree I stood before at Galeries Lafayette, Klove's works make me stop and look again. There are necklaces that seem to have slipped off the body of some extravagant dream, chandeliers that gather a room around them and installations that make glass appear to bloom, branch, hover. The forms may feel new, even startling, but the care within them is old and deep: the Indian attention to detail, to hand, to patient technique, to the thousand decisions by which an idea becomes something living.

That is what I see in their work across India and overseas. From Dubai Expo 2020 to Bombay Sapphire, from Swarovski to the National Gallery of Modern Art, from couture collaborations to spaces made for gathering and wonder, Prateek and Gautam carry Indian craft into the world without sanding away its character. They work with glass blowers and artisans, and with materials that ask for both precision and surrender. A hand shapes what a machine might standardise; a breath gives molten glass its curve, its quiver, its life. The result is not merely made in India. It is imagined, negotiated, crafted and finished with an Indian sophistication that belongs on any world stage.

I speak of Lalique and Baccarat with affection because four pieces of Lalique wait in a cupboard in my Delhi home, and a Baccarat crystal lamp glows beside my bed. Their simplicity, shimmer and sound tell me what good design can do. One day I hope to live with a Klove piece in that intimate way. Yet I have already felt their majesty in stores and in other people's homes. You need not own a work of art to feel it alter the air around you.

I first met the boys through the effervescent and poetic Shazia Ilmi, a generous friend and enthusiastic matchmaker. She once rang me with Gautam beside her and asked why we did not know each other. I remain single; the friendship has endured. Shazia travels widely and returns telling me their creativity is unmatched. She is right.

At Galeries Lafayette, in the heat and the rooftop glow, I felt what their work gives us: not simply light, but a reason to look up. India is proud of Prateek and Gautam. They have taken the brilliance of Indian hands and imagination across borders, and brought it back to us, radiant, refined, gloriously alive and luminous. ■